

## Research

### Divine intervention: Blacks use prayer to cope with stress

*By Jared Wadley  
News Service*

Blacks are more likely to pray during stressful circumstances than whites, a U-M study shows.

Black respondents (both African Americans and blacks of Caribbean descent) are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to indicate that they use prayer to cope with stressful situations and look to God for support, strength and guidance.

About 90 percent of African Americans, 86 percent of Caribbean blacks and 60 percent of non-Hispanic whites said that prayer is very important when coping with life problems.

"The findings suggest that in this analysis of race and ethnicity influences, race status (being black vs. non-Hispanic white) is more important than ethnicity (being of Caribbean descent) in patterning attitudes concerning religious coping," the researchers say in the study.

The research is a first-of-its-kind investigation of the correlates of religious coping (prayer during stressful times) among African Americans, Caribbean blacks and non-Hispanic whites. The inclusion of Caribbean blacks allows investigation of ethnic differences within the black population that typically are not taken into account.

Understanding the diversity that exists within the black population is vitally important, as Caribbean blacks are significantly different from African Americans on a number of social status and religious characteristics, the researchers say in the study.

U-M researchers include Linda Chatters, a professor of social work and public health; Robert J. Taylor, professor and associate dean of research in the [School of Social Work](#); and James S. Jackson, director of the Institute for Social Research (ISR).

The findings appear in the current issue of the *Journal of Community Psychology*.

Researchers used data from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL): Coping with Stress in the 21st Century, collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at ISR. The NSAL includes the first-ever major probability sample of Caribbean blacks.

Respondents reflected on attitudes and opinions about religious coping, and provided information about their religious affiliation and demographic characteristics.

For both African Americans and Caribbean blacks, women and married respondents were more likely to look to God for guidance than were men and persons who cohabit with their partners, respectively.

The researchers noted some circumstances in which using prayer solely to cope with problems can lead to negative outcomes. Sole reliance on religious coping strategies may prevent individuals from seeking professional help, which might create problems if it delays timely medical attention and diagnosis of a health problem.

"These observations suggest that while religious coping may represent an important and central resource in handling life problems, under particular circumstances, it may be detrimental to health and well-being outcomes," Chatters says.

In comparing regional differences, Southerners are more likely than respondents in the Northeast, North Central and West to seek strength and guidance from God. Denominational differences indicate that Baptists are more likely than Methodists and respondents with no religious affiliations to pray in dealing with stress.

African Americans and Caribbean blacks with fewer years of formal education were more likely than their counterparts to endorse the importance of prayer. This contradicts other research that finds education and other measures of socioeconomic status are inconsistent predictors of religious participation, the researchers say.

Among Caribbean blacks, there were differences in religious coping attitudes based on country of origin and immigration history, suggesting new areas of study.